

Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation *Progress Report*

July 2012

Message from the Chief

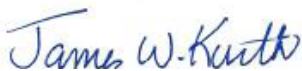
Have you ever had the simultaneous -- but contradictory -- feelings that hardly any time has passed since an event took place, and yet the event seems to have taken place a long time ago? Thinking about the first anniversary of the *Conserving the Future* conference, I have those mixed feelings. Has a year really passed since Madison, Wisconsin, pulsated with the excitement of more than 1,100 people who had a unified, new vision for the future of the Refuge System?

Conserving the Future implementation has generated so many approaches and so much passion over the past 12 months that the conference is nearly a distant memory, until I remember the messages we heard from Majora Carter, Juan Martinez, Jane Goodall and Sylvia Earle, among others. Even more important were the messages I heard from people in the hallways and meeting rooms, enthused by the *Conserving the Future* vision, which was written with the next generation of conservation leaders in mind.

Our response in Madison -- our continuing response -- to today's conservation challenges is optimism. We said in Madison that we will step forward to build on the conservation legacy we have been given. In the 12 months since Madison, we have done that -- leading when it's appropriate, following when we should, and always energizing the conservation community and all who love the great outdoors.

This progress report recognizes that our work is not nearly complete -- but it is proceeding. We've made real strides since we pledged ourselves to our *Conserving the Future* mission. We have many more strides to take.

It is fully appropriate, on this first anniversary, to recognize how far we have come in moving the vision forward, even as we acknowledge how much more work we have to do. Best of all, we -- Refuge Friends, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees, NGO partners, state organizations -- all of us are doing this work together.



Jim Kurth
Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

Introduction

In July 2011, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe charged the Refuge System to "incorporate the best ideas and the work done in Madison into a final vision document... to define a future that respects the past and the partnerships and traditions that have brought us to this point." Just a year after the historic *Conserving the Future* vision conference in Madison, WI, the nine implementation teams-- tackling the 24 recommendations-- are moving forward with incredible speed and the results have been remarkable.



Communications

A central theme throughout the entire *Conserving the Future* vision is people. The Communications implementation team, tasked with helping get the message out about America's Refuge System, has hired a premier consulting firm to help craft a strategic communications plan. The firm found that the Refuge System has 20 percent of the "voice" in on-line conversations, but was heard far less in areas such as clean water, clean air and outdoor recreation. In addition to this initial research, the firm will conduct focus groups in two cities to test messages and communications methodologies.

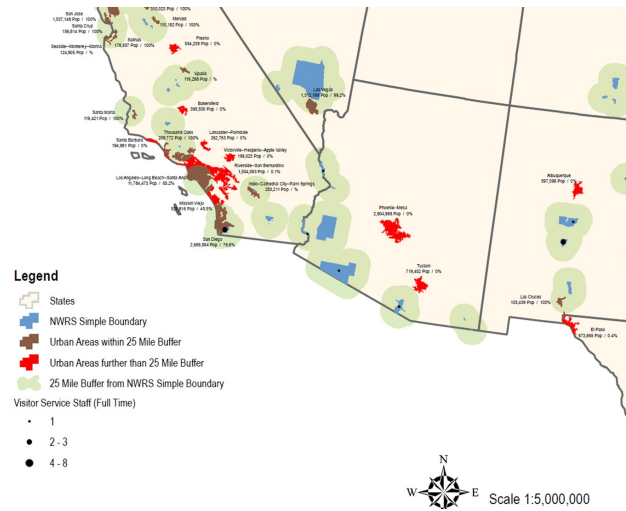


Conserving the Future Progress Report

Wildlife Refuge Urban Initiative

The Urban implementation team has developed a map of “urban” refuges, defined those serving communities with at least 500,000 people within 25 miles of a refuge and hosting at least 200,000 visitors annually.

According to a recent Visitor Satisfaction Survey, the average visitor travels 20-25 miles to get to a refuge; refuge visitation figures came from the Refuge Annual Performance Reporting (RAPP). As with implementation, this mapping effort continues to evolve as more criteria are built in and newer versions continue to define an “urban” refuge.



The Urban team held a series of partnership meetings in late June to discuss engaging urban audiences in the outdoors. The [National Park Service](#) has a presence in some cities and recommended [GroundworksUSA.org](#) as a launching organization. The [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation](#) discussed its latest work with corporations and how companies are making investments in local communities. The [National Audubon Society](#), which recently produced a new strategic plan, often build its urban presence in brownfields and areas easily accessible to people. Many more innovative ideas were gathered at the meetings, including a proposal by [Trust for Public Land](#) to sponsor the proposed 2013 Urban Summit.

Interpretation and Environmental Education

The Refuge System has provided environmental education to traditional visitors and supporters for decades, building awareness, understanding and appreciation for natural and cultural resources and communicating key concepts. However, America is changing, with more than 80 percent of people now living and working in urban areas. To address this, the Interpretation and Environmental Education implementation team is modulating the traditional approach, developing a draft strategy that will make environmental education and interpretation far more relevant to people with little experience in outdoor pursuits. Among the strategy’s goals is engaging key audiences, providing high quality programs and evaluating programs to ensure measureable outputs and outcomes.

Members of the Interpretation and Environmental Education team are spearheading an initiative to reconstitute the Refuge System-wide Ambassadors program, which was piloted in the Southwest Region more than a decade ago. The program sought to train all employees who met the public in communications and welcoming skills, whether they worked in management, biology, law enforcement or maintenance.



Conserving the Future Progress Report

Strategic Growth

The Strategic Growth implementation team is working on three products: a rapid assessment of refuge acquisition projects; draft strategic growth policy; and a list of recommendations to address issues beyond a strategic growth policy. The team has resolved to focus on key issues, including the use of science in refuge land protection proposals, coordinating refuge proposals with the nation's 22 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs), sustainability and national priorities. The national priorities currently identified by legislation or refuge establishment purposes are too broad, so the team has worked to refine the list to include only those species whose outcomes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can affect and the use of good science at the regional and LLC levels.

Stories from the front lines of implementation are shared periodically in a feature called "In the Spotlight" on the blog at <http://AmericasWildlife.org/blog>. Here is an excerpt from the Strategic Growth Implementation team spotlight.

"As we look forward at how to strategically grow the National Wildlife Refuge System, we cannot ignore the many Service programs that build support and partnerships that benefit our National Wildlife Refuges. One of those programs is the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners). The program was born in Western Minnesota through the eyes of Refuge managers."



Craig Isola & Matt Hamman, Partners, with Ed Burton, NRCS California State Conservationist

To read the rest of the story go to <http://americaswildlife.org/blog/>.

Leadership Development

The Leadership Development Council (LDC) is making progress on its charge to create a workforce that reflects the diversity in the civilian labor force. The team has started conversations with the Division of Diversity and Civil Rights in the Fish and Wildlife Service Headquarters and may extend that conversation into all Service regions to understand more fully the barriers to hiring applicants of diverse backgrounds.

As the Leadership Development Council evaluates similar recommendations in "Fulfilling the Promise" – the Refuge System's guiding strategy adopted in 1999 -- the team has focused on researching the leadership-related courses offered at the National Conservation Training Center and finding alternatives for employees not accepted into some of the more competitive courses.

A new workforce assessment sub-team, chaired by the LDC, is addressing a variety of workforce-related needs; all designed to ensure that Service employees have the education and skills to do the landscape-scale, partner-based conservation work of tomorrow. The team includes representation of each implementation team concerned in workforce issues.



Conserving the Future Progress Report

Hunting, Fishing and Outdoor Recreation

The Hunting, Fishing, and Outdoor Recreation implementation team is tasked to work closely with the states to find new or existing opportunities, especially for individuals with disabilities and youth. In coming weeks, the team will ask refuge managers to identify opportunities already available, thus setting a baseline to build upon.

The implementation team is committed to engaging a range of stakeholders by attending opportunistic conferences and workshops throughout the U.S. Two examples are workshops held by the States Organization for Boating Access meeting in Mobile, AL, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies annual meeting in Hilton Head Island, SC. Both meetings are in September.

The Hunting, Fishing and Outdoor Recreation team has formed sub-teams focused on welcoming and orienting hunters and anglers and educating visitors about outdoor skills. These sub-teams are working to identify barriers to bringing outdoor skills to the Refuge System and enhancing the visitor experience.

“To be successful, we will need the continued support of our state fish and wildlife agency colleagues. Our conservation partners’ support will be critical, as it always has been.” **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe**

Community Partnerships

The Community Partnerships implementation team is moving with remarkable speed. The team completed a survey of wildlife refuges to establish baseline information and collect ideas on how to strengthen volunteer programs, Friends organizations and community partnerships. The results will help the team draft a strategic plan to increase the number and effectiveness of volunteers, Friends and partnerships. A sub-team is assembling a handbook that will serve as a reference guide to volunteers, Friends and community partnerships that interact with the Refuge System.

Another charge for the team is to develop and nurture active and vibrant Friends groups. To help achieve this recommendation, the team is moving forward with the idea for Friends and Partnerships Mentoring program. Having assessed the needs of over 20 field

In the [Spotlight](#) blog:

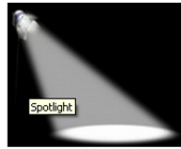
We Get By With a Little Help From Our Friends

“I wanted to be part of this team because of my past experience as a refuge manager supported by hundreds of volunteers, and because of my present role as a Board member of a Friends organization for a State Wildlife Area in California.”

staff and 12 Friends, the team found they had similar issues, including organizational development, staff development and a need for a triage or one-stop-shop when strategies fail or have not been employed.

“In the Spotlight” – Hunting, Fishing, and Outdoor Recreation Implementation Team

By [America's Wildlife](#) in May 9th 2012 [No Comment »](#)
Filed Under [Implementation](#) [Edit](#)



The Next Teddy Roosevelt?

Theodore Roosevelt (TR), leader of the Rough Riders and hero at San Juan, progressive politician and social reformer, 26th President of the United States – TR was also known as the “Great Conservationist” and set aside over 125 million acres of national forest while president, and created the first national wildlife refuge, Pelican Island, in 1903. How did TR come to care about conservation? His effectiveness for conservation came from his intellect, personality, and office; however, his care came from exposure to wild things and wild places early in life. TR was a naturalist and a hunter. He loved the out-of-doors and he wanted to make sure that others could experience what he enjoyed for years to come.



Conserving the Future Progress Report

Planning

The Planning implementation team has sent a survey to refuge managers, planners and all who have been involved in Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP) and step-down plans over the past decade. The team is seeking to understand about what worked in the first round of CCP -- and what didn't-- as it works to improve planning processes, the plans' content and their implementation.

The team is completing a status check of habitat management plans, visitor services plans, wilderness management plans, and other step down management plans. The team has completed a table showing the number of visitor services and habitat management step-down plans completed by each region. The team has also been researching current Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) planning documents and the planning processes of other agencies and conservation organizations.

Scientific Excellence

The Scientific Excellence implementation team, which is responsible for four recommendations, has formed several sub-teams, including one focused on building an Adaptive Management (AM) handbook - a simple and concise way of demonstrating AM applications. The sub-team is seeking advice from experts to write the document.

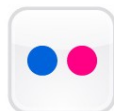
The inventory and monitoring (I&M) sub-team, concentrating on Recommendation 7, formed a smaller group of regional I&M coordinators and data managers and has already entered almost 5,000 records in the pilot ServCat (Service Catalogue) online system and centralized web application, expected to be available soon. Another sub-team, focusing on providing guidance and protocols for I&M, has completed a first draft of guidance documents and is devising an implementation schedule for protocols.



Join the Online Community

Now, your voice again can be heard as the Fish and Wildlife Service celebrates the one-year anniversary of the *Conserving the Future* vision's adoption. Follow *Conserving the Future* accomplishments by visiting the [Americaswildlife](http://Americaswildlife.org) Web site. While you're online, join the social network and the groups that reflect your interest.

Conserving the Future is the Refuge System's management pathway for the next decade, making a difference in how each employee does the work of conservation, and how each Refuge System supporter can move conservation achievement forward.



Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.
Henry Ford